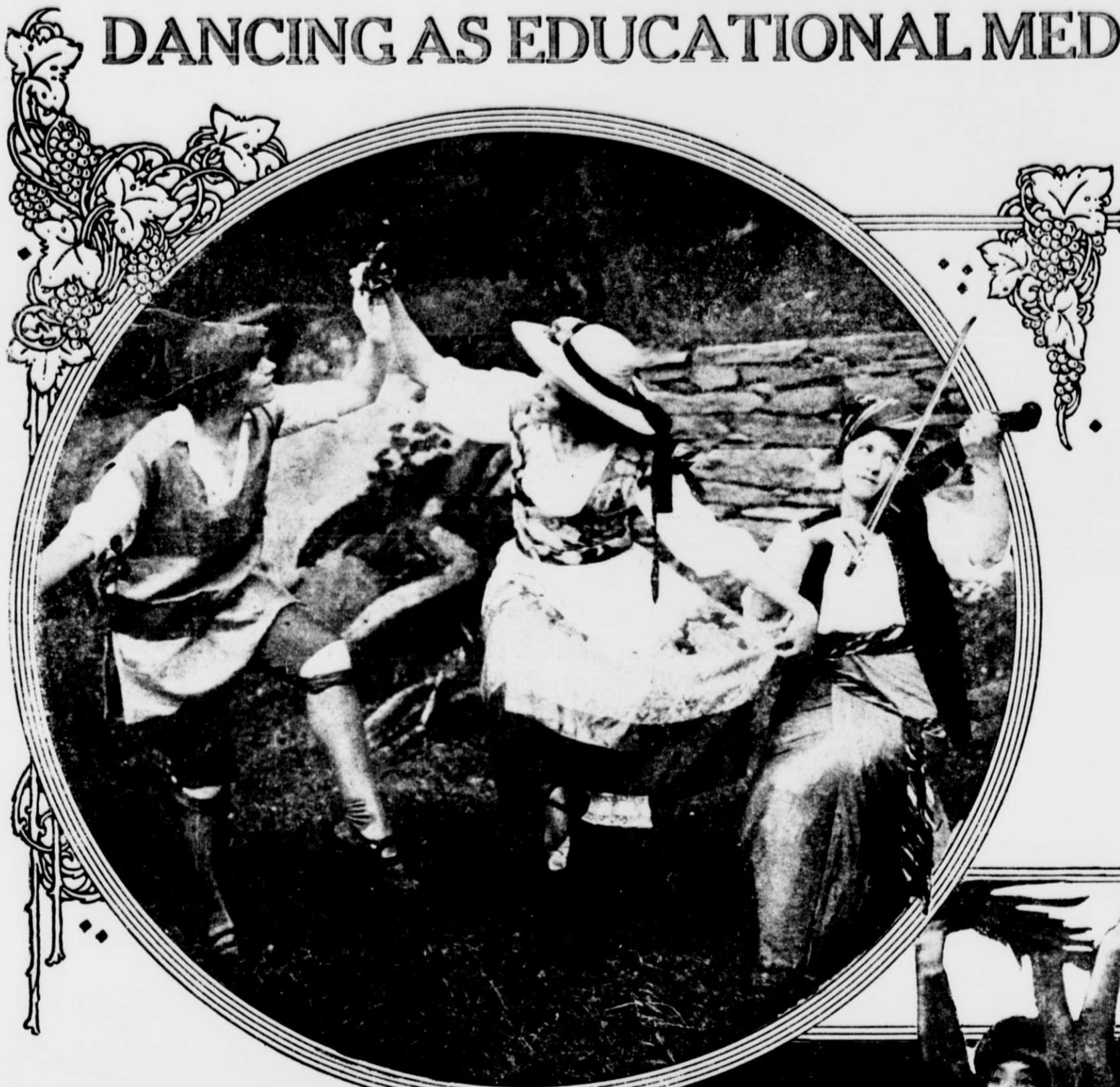


DANCING AS EDUCATIONAL MEDIUM FOR CHILDREN



"Come, foot it lightly o'er the green and tune a merry lay."

Mrs. Mary Perry King, Pioneer Teacher in Art of Motion Education, Says It Is Very Effective in Training the Young Idea

HIDDEN away in the heart of the Catskills, in almost the identical region immortalized by Washington Irving in his story of Rip Van Winkle's twenty years' slumber, is Moonshine, the studio of Mrs. Mary Perry King, pioneer teacher in the art of motion education. Here she works with her classes from early morning until the sun is setting behind the high mountain peaks in the rear of her studio. Not a house nor a car is in sight; only the endless panoramic view of mountains and far across the Hudson the promontories of the Berkshires.

Here is absolute tranquillity; through the summer and early autumn goes on the work of perfecting in rhythm when the chosen for their career the art of motion, whether it is in physical culture, the many intricate interpretations of the classic dance, the poetic ballet or the rhythmic drama.

The studio is spacious, opening on a gallery overlooking the valley below on one side and on the other on a stage as big as that of the average theatre, on which the students work and rehearse as conscientiously as if before the footlights. Mrs. King employs skilled musicians, has her special lights for color effects, has every available facility to familiarize each pupil with the ultimate results of her days, weeks and sometimes months of strenuous toil. For to become an artist means toil, whether in dancing, acting, music or any of the sister arts; and the amount of work necessary to perfect the mind and body equally is tremendous. It means renunciation of all the disor-

dering interruptions and excesses that the present luxury loving generation looks upon almost as a necessity.

When asked her opinion of the prevailing interest in the so-called modern dances she replied:

"Dancing is to motion exactly what poetry is to language. Every dance, even though extremely modern, tells inevitably its own particular story. What do I think of the tango or hesitation? Mercy! Don't ask me. They have at least one commendable feature. Any one who wishes can dance them, unless afflicted with wooden leg or deafness," and Mrs. King's merry laugh rang out.

"I do believe it is another step in the evolution of the art of best human motion and development. Dancing has aroused enthusiasm in old and young, irrespective of class, and any decent dance, done with distinction, is worth while. People seem to be obsessed with dancing to-day, as in the past there were ages when the soul of the world seemed engulfed in religious ecstasy.

"In the days of religious ecstasy art and science and all physical rights were ignored, but now the efforts of life seem to exaggerate physical and material indulgence with the recklessness of forces too long repressed.

"In earlier ages, when dancing, athletic sports and music held sway above all else, their appeal was wholly to the senses. The gladdening of spirit and interesting thought did not enter into

possibilities of the human body as a medium of expressing fine thought and feeling. My pupils are all trained dancers when they come to me. My work is to lead them to harmony of thought and feeling and action that shall vitalize and enrich their expressive values. One pupil in her practice work can more plainly illustrate than I can describe exactly what I wish to convey."

In the studio a dancer famous on two continents was hard at work on upper body exercises and she continued her work while The Star reporter watched her interpretation of Longfellow's poem "Daybreak," which was given so clearly that a novice could not fail to understand the meaning of each motion phrase.

Mrs. King, in talking of rhythmic education, was emphatic in her ideas as to the freedom of garments which should be worn by women at all times. "Imagine," said Mrs. King, "how absurd Cleopatra or Ruth, Helen of Troy or the Queen of Sheba would appear in hampering r-wins and high heeled shoes. The glamour they hold over our imagination would assuredly be lost; they would become crippled, distorted and the spell of their individual poetry of motion would be broken.

"No hands or feet or body can be kept beautiful by confinement or disuse. Fine motion of any portion of the body trains down gross development and evolves finer form. Fine motion controlled by a well developed rational brain and God given spirit means a perfect, whole, human instrument. Its beauty means its freedom to express the best it can. There is more magic in the use of the hand of the orator or the use of a dancer's hand or foot than in the member itself.

"Art of motion is the basis of personal magnetism. Lovable spirit, a sound flexible body and well working mind encompass all that is potent in human charm. Isadora Duncan had the courage to present to the world her interpretation of the sensuous influ-

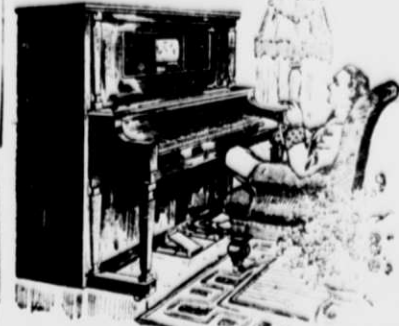
ment demand that every natural instinct be curbed by fashionable usage.

"I have in mind an incident which will serve to illustrate my point. It came under my observation while conducting my winter work. A girl came to me asking my help to place her where she might be able to earn a livelihood sufficient to aid in educating her younger sisters and brothers. She was of foreign origin with all the fire and pathos of her race written in her expressive features.

"With my years of teaching, of observation and character reading I needed no further proof of her worth than the serious, wistful expression of her almost childish face. To begin with, she was beautiful of face, but with an uncouth, insignificant body which needed help to catch up to the girl's mind and spirit. I saw great possibilities in her and knowing the tenacity of her race I decided to educate her body at my own expense. Besides, I wanted to demonstrate for my own satisfaction what could be accomplished with perseverance.

"With this end in view, we began the foundation work for poetic and dramatic dancing. She had a retentive memory and above all things was willing and eager to work. She studied and worked almost incessantly for nearly three years, foregoing her friends, her home and every former association, considering nothing too much to do for the end which she wished to attain. To-day she ranks among the few really moving dramatic and poetic rhythmic artists. But there was genius there and it only needed the necessary harmonizing of mind and spirit to the powers of the body to bring it to the surface. She is only one example of the many whose expressive talents are hidden because of lack of attunement.

"People talk of 'personal magnetism and fate,' 'personal beauty.' Nonsense! The gracious and irresistible allurements which great personalities, whether they



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"The Hymn to Adonis."



"Now comes the golden sunlight up the glad earth once more."



Mary Perry King.

such things. To-day we have an advanced order of being with which to cope; consequently we are no longer satisfied with the mere attainment of physical performance in the society dance; it must mean higher education in motion art as a broader knowledge of what fine human motion really is.

"The public is no longer satisfied with dexterous command of leg and foot muscles. People are slowly awakening to the realization that pleasing motion must fitly convey pleasing thought and feeling as clearly and concisely as though spoken. To convey to an audience just what every motion means in pantomime requires mental as well as physical ability. For that reason we are devoting a great deal of time to poetic dances.

"To dance poetically is to develop latent

ence of music through the rhythm of free natural abandonment. Miss St. Denis contributed her exemplification of superb muscular control and her interpretation of historic dances. Pavlova and Mordkin illustrated the fascinating results of ballet dancing, combined with great dramatic ability; and in the wake of these distinguished performers there has been a general revival of classic dance and widespread experiment with interpretative dance which has proved a new social pleasure and a very fruitful educational medium."

"In your opinion, should dancing be considered by public educational boards as a study for the elementary school?"

"Assuredly. DeSarte, Froebel and Pestalozzi have clearly demonstrated the fact that young children will most readily and effectively take correction and constructive suggestion from play and play acting or any kind of pleasant make believe. Well chosen, interesting and beautiful exercises accomplish better results than dreary calisthenics, and of all pleasant exercises a high order of dancing has proved the most comprehensive and effective. Its accompaniment of fine poetic thought and feeling, its inspiring music, its rhythmic ballet, vigorous action and its social usefulness easily win for it a foremost place among educational mediums.

"To illustrate: Take the tiny tots of the East Side. Nature demands that they dance in harmony with music. The hardy-gurdy affords them all the incentive necessary, and natural freedom to follow instinctive prompting does the rest.

"We need not wonder that many of our most artistic dancers and of our artists in dramatic interpretation spring from humble origin, since from babyhood their inherent out-reaching tendencies have been allowed to develop, and dwarfed by the stilted costumes of their less fortunate sisters whose environ-

ment demand that every natural instinct be curbed by fashionable usage. I have in mind an incident which will serve to illustrate my point. It came under my observation while conducting my winter work. A girl came to me asking my help to place her where she might be able to earn a livelihood sufficient to aid in educating her younger sisters and brothers. She was of foreign origin with all the fire and pathos of her race written in her expressive features.

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"People talk of 'personal magnetism and fate,' 'personal beauty.' Nonsense! The gracious and irresistible allurements which great personalities, whether they

be dancers or actresses, kings or teachers, exercise over their audiences is quite as apt to spring from graceful mobility and nobleness of bearing as from loveliness of face or figure.

"There is an elusive, irresistible power, something almost superhuman, in the bearing and motion of some people, either in public or in private life, which stamps them with distinction on their own. Duse, for example, owes her preeminence to a rare personality that is freely and fully expressed through the truest and finest of motion.

"As an incentive to study, let me tell you of an instance of the power of dancing. I know a school teacher who has added to her regular duties the teaching of folk dancing to her pupils. She teaches this after regular hours, admitting to the instruction only such members of her class as attain high marks not only in mental work but in the care of the hands, hair and general dress. At the end of the term the pupils give an exhibition for parents and friends.

"The teacher tells me that she has never had such marked efficiency from pupils before, as every one is striving for a mark high enough to insure entrance into the dancing classes, notwithstanding the fact that three or four hours each week are taken from their play time to learn the dances."

Mrs. King is of American birth. Her father, Albertus Perry, was of an old Puritan family from western Massachusetts, a graduate of Williams College, and at the time of his daughter's birth a lawyer in New York State. Her mother was of Huguenot extraction, so that Mrs. King combines the New England capacity for idealism and hard thinking with the Latin vivacity and brilliancy of temperament. She is a graduate of the Oswego Normal College,

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